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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DILI 000219

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SUBJECT: POLITICIZATION, CRONYISM PERSIST IN NATIONAL POLICE

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Following the disintegration of the Dili District-based National Police (PNTL) in late May 2006, and numerous allegations of PNTL officers being involved in the violence that beset Dili at that time, the new United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor Leste (UNMIT) put into place a process for vetting and reintegrating all Dili-based officers before they could return to work. This process is now moving into its final stages in the capital, and its focus is shifting to the nation's other 12 districts. We are increasingly concerned that despite the clear need to reform PNTL and the extensive resources that have been directed into the vetting, the "new" PNTL is taking a shape that is reminiscent of the old one. Key problems include: an institutional culture in which accountability is less important than political and/or personal interests; a politicized police force where commanders, particularly at the district level, are beholden to their political masters; and regional divisions that emerged last year as the destructive East versus West dynamic shows signs of becoming entrenched. In this context, it is not evident that the UN-led vetting and reintegration process is more than a cosmetic fix, effectively sidestepping these deep-seated issues. While the current Minister of Interior, Alcino Barris, lacks his predecessor's thuggishness and cunning, he unfortunately appears to have continued his tendency to assign personnel on the basis of political and personal loyalty rather than competence. Despite its executive authority over PNTL, UNPOL's reach is limited and there is a sense among some within the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and PNTL that the UNMIT mandate can be simply waited out. Post believes that any successful program to improve PNTL must be sustained, well-coordinated, and rooted in East Timor's cultural and political context. End summary.

Vetting and reintegration status

12. (SBU) Nine months into the UNMIT mission, the process of vetting Dili District-based PNTL is now in its final stages. Of 1265 officers, all but 36 registered for the process, indicating a high initial level of motivation on the part of the vast majority of officers to return to work. According to Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) Eric Tan, a total of 451 of these officers were initially flagged for suspicions relating to misconduct either during last year's crisis or prior. As of May 23, 112 were still pending the completion of ongoing integrity investigations by the UNPOL-supervised PNTL Reform, Restructuring, and Rebuilding Division. Tan noted that 32% of officers who have passed screening failed mandatory arms re-qualification training, and that 16% of officers scheduled to participate failed to attend the training. It is uncertain what the final disposition of these officers will be.

13. (SBU) In late 2006, the MoI, apparently frustrated with the slowness of the UN process and also wanting more overall control, began its own parallel vetting process. Rather than challenging the Minister by asserting its mandate relative to the security sector, the UN accommodated this move, condoning a formalized dual process. The result was that in order to prevent conflicting outcomes from the two processes, UNPOL vetting officials had to do double duty by sitting on the decision-making bodies formed under each vetting approach. Tan has assured us that no such parallel process will be started for the district-level vetting and we note that the MoI is not at this time exhibiting any inclination to do so.

14. (SBU) The UNPOL-supervised vetting process for the PNTL outside of Dili is still in the ramp up stage, with the majority of officers now registered. This process will differ in some key respects from the one implemented in Dili. First, the

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officers to be vetted have remained on duty throughout the crisis and up to the present and will continue to work while they are vetted with the exception of a small number to be identified for suspension. (Note: DSRSG Tan has relayed to us that they have agreed to a cap of no more than 10% to be suspended. While this is understandable in terms of the need to maintain police operations in the district, there are concerns that it could result in the retention of problem police.) Second, the process will be top down, starting rather than ending with the command positions. According to DSRSG Tan, UNPOL has already identified several district commanders as candidates for suspension but Tan is concerned about the potential complexities involved in implementing this.

Criticisms of the reintegration process

15. (C) Credible sources within both UNMIT and the PNTL have expressed concerns that the UNPOL process, encompassing both the vetting and a training and mentoring program before officers can be fully recertified, is falling short. While the vetting has been lengthy (some say far too lengthy) it is not clear that it has been effective at keeping out bad officers, or ensuring that good ones can get back on the job quickly. Moreover, the way it has played out has undercut morale in some cases and created tensions within the PNTL in others. International NGO contacts have relayed to Emboffs cases in which they have been threatened and shaken down by PNTL members who have cleared the vetting and are back at work, but are actively linked with neighborhood gangs. In contrast, Julio Hornay, the Director of the National Police Academy notes that there are a number of good officers who have passed the vetting in regards to their role in the 2006 crisis, but have remained in limbo pending resolution of cases that had previously been resolved or dismissed. Moreover, he notes that others whose vetting results have not been announced have been called back by UNPOL nonetheless. Hornay notes that he is facing tensions at the Academy where police who remained

at their duty stations in 2006 are still waiting for their vetting results, while a number of those who departed their duty stations, including some mentioned in the UN's Commission of Inquiry report, are back on the job.

16. (C) PNTL officers have also not been impressed with the UNPOL training and mentoring. Once vetted, officers must undergo a one week pre-certification training and then serve alongside UNPOL mentors for six months before a final evaluation. However, there are no indications from successfully vetted officers at both high and lower echelons that the training is having a significant effect on the way they think as professionals. Police Academy Director Hornay describes the training as extremely basic, lacking the depth or length that might make it useful. He describes the mentoring as being mostly pro forma - the only "mentoring" he has seen of officers at the academy involves UNPOL officers dropping by to make sure the officers have reported to work. Hornay's skepticism of the UNPOL process is shared by PNTL Deputy Commissioner for Administration Hermenegildo Da Cruz (who last year was selected to attend the FBI's National Academy). Da Cruz describes the process as being nothing more than a cosmetic hurdle PNTL must overcome before it is back to managing its own affairs.

The "new" PNTL: much like the old

17. (C) Perhaps of greater concern than the weaknesses of the vetting and reintegration program is the fact that this effort largely sidesteps the central set of problems the PNTL faces, namely politicization and the divisions and lack of professionalism it engenders. Ex-Minister of Interior and imprisoned felon Rogerio Lobato's shadow continues to loom large over the institution he ran like a private mafia. Sources both in and out of the MoI often noted that, while under house arrest, Lobato continued to be influential through his ties to both Barris and his chief of staff. While Barris is arguably less problematic than Lobato, he nonetheless appears to be

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beholden to the orders of the Fretilin Central Committee (CCF). This has been evident in the continuing practice of appointing key leadership positions at the national, district and special unit level, on the basis of political loyalties vice competence.

The current acting Police Commissioner, Afonso de Jesus seems to have been selected for his pliability. Emboffs have found that he is universally regarded as a weak leader within the PNTL.

18. (C) Blatantly thumbing his nose at UNMIT, Minister of Interior Barris nominated an un-vetted and ethically compromised officer, Jorge Monteiro, to the position of Deputy Commander for Operations in March. Monteiro has been the subject of several investigations involving allegations of intimidation, illegal receipt of funds, involvement in a protection racket for organized prostitution, and other significant indiscretions. He also happens to be related to Barris and is widely thought of as one of the brightest and most capable PNTL officers, creating a significant challenge in achieving accountability in his case. His dismissal may not be the ideal solution in terms of retaining qualified personnel and keeping tabs on potential troublemakers. UNPOL accelerated Monteiro's vetting process in response to the appointment, completing the investigation a couple weeks ago. According to PNTL sources, Monteiro has been found guilty of at least some of the past charges and has been recommended for suspension. However, as of June 1 he remains on the job.

19. (C) Apparently on orders from Minister Barris acting Commissioner De Jesus replaced popular Dili-based Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) Commander Inocencio Neves with the divisive former commander Armando Monteiro, who had been relieved of his position for abandoning his duties during last year's crisis. Monteiro, also a relative of Barris (and a cousin of Jorge Montiero), is a Fretilin party stalwart implicated by several sources for involvement in arms transfers last year, although apparently cleared by the UNPOL vetting.

Since his assumption of command, he has reportedly surrounded himself with officers from his eastern home district of Lautem - a move that, along with similar developments elsewhere in the institution, is raising the specter of East-West divisions again within PNTL. UIR officers have relayed to Embassy staff their unhappiness with the leadership change and many are not reporting to work because of the resulting tensions. (Note: The UN cites absenteeism as one of their main challenges in developing the PNTL, but does not acknowledge any linkage between absenteeism and poor morale caused by the other problems discussed in this report.)

¶10. (C) Outside of Dili there is increasing concern about politically-based decisions in regard to the influential district commander positions. Post has confirmed that the Ermera District PNTL Commander was replaced this week by his deputy, a trusted Fretilin ally. According to trusted PNTL sources, the district commander has not been willing to bend to Fretilin pressure to paint recent incidents in Ermera as victimizing Fretilin. He is generally viewed as even-handed, and UNPOL has been happy with him, which begs the question of why UNPOL allowed this replacement to go forward when they have authority over all such decisions. Similar machinations have occurred recently in Bobonaro District, where Minister of State Administration Ana Pessoa is reportedly trying to reinstate Border Patrol Unit (BPU) Commander Antonio Da Cruz (no relation to Hermenegildo), another Fretilin loyalist, fired for engaging in overt political activities including the transfer of weapons to civilians for which former Interior Minister Lobato now sits in prison. There is also significant pressure from Pessoa and the regional Secretary of State Lino Torreza (a cousin of Da Cruz) to replace the PNTL commander in Bobonaro District for not being sufficiently pro-Fretilin. In a positive departure from this pattern, the suspension of embattled Viqueque District Commander Gaspar Soares for overt pro-Fretilin political activity during the presidential campaign period has been formalized. Soares was found guilty in a PNTL investigation of direct involvement in two attacks on supporters of Jose Ramos-Horta. However, Deputy Commissioner Da Cruz has expressed

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concern that Minister Barris may put on pressure to keep Soares in place.

¶11. (C) Comment: In this context, the UN-led vetting and reintegration process appears to be little more than a cosmetic fix. The vetting is unlikely to result in more than a handful of unsuitable individuals being kept out of the force, while the retraining and recertification process is simply too cursory to make a long-term impact. Moreover, those aspects of the UNPOL program that are potentially more substantive, i.e. the mentoring model being employed, are suffering from the same basic weaknesses of previous UN efforts to develop the PNTL. With over 40 countries represented in UNPOL and the constant turnover within the force, it is impossible to ensure quality or consistency in the mentoring provided. There is no quick-fix to developing the PNTL. This is a young police force that will take years to develop, and whose officers have had no sustained exposure to high-quality policing. While an impressive volume of training has been directed at the PNTL since 1999, much of it has simply been too inconsistent. Programs must focus on direct, prolonged, and high-quality engagement to have a chance at long-term success. In the medium-term, reasonable expectations are called for; programs designed on the premise of being able to remake the organization in a short period of time are doomed to fail, particularly if nothing is done to ensure that the PNTL possesses mature leadership and esprit de corps throughout its ranks. End comment.

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